

Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Eliza Symonds Bell, October 10, 1877, with transcript

Letter from Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell to Mrs. Alexander Melville Bell. Glasgow, October 10, 1877. My dear Mrs. Bell:

My letter, I do not know the date, for Alec has it, — speaking of my letter from Bristol came this morning. I feel very badly to think how few letters you have received from us since then. My neglect has been quite unintentional and Alec has tried to write each day, but has not been well and so felt too tired every evening. I wish he would write, not only for your sake but for that of all his correspondents, for he refuses to write to any until he has sent a long letter to his “own dear Mamma”.

I hope you will find this ink more satisfactory than the other if not it must be the fault of my paper and I will get some thicker.

Thank you for your advice about Alec's meals but you misunderstood the cause of his trouble. The pain has been in the hip and all along down the right leg, not in the side at all. Chester to whom I wrote and Dr. Whyte of Elgin who saw Alec both say the trouble is a neuralgic affection of the great nerve of that leg, very painful, but not at all alarming. A week by the seaside near Elgin has done wonders for Alec he has had no return of the pain for some time and altogether seems brighter and better than I have seen him for sometime. If he does suffer from indigestion I shall remember what you say.

My last letter I think was from Edinburgh. We left the next day for Aberdeen via Stirling and had no chance to see about your trumpet cups. Edinburgh, Sunday October 14th., Alec put away my letter on leaving Glasgow and forgot all about it and I could not find it until this morning and was too discouraged at my failure with so many letters to begin another at St. Andrews. We left Glasgow Wednesday and spent two days at St. Andrews. Mr.

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Archibald Bell told Alec he would hear all about his ancestors from the Miss Richards there so we made a pilgrimage to St. Andrews, alas Alec took 2 one of his bad headaches and we lost the best part of one day and then it appeared that the eldest Miss Richards had died three months before and the others knew nothing of the family history. Alec thought the oldest Miss Richards might have lasted three months longer for his benefit. Miss Richards told Alec of an place where he could study the town records but we no more time to spare, and came on here yesterday, too late however, for Alec to do any shopping for you. He says that he will go and call on Mrs. Richardson today. He leave for London tonighte at ten.

Now for an account of what we have been doing since I last wrote. We left Edinburgh on the 22nd of September and reached Aberdeen that same evening, stopping on our way at Stirling, visiting the old Castle and walking up and down the covered walk on the ramparts where Queen Mary and Douglas so often walked. At Aberdeen we met Mr. James Walker one of the Secretaries of the Social Science Congress, and Alec was at once taken possession of, and marched around to be introduced to all the celebrities in town, to Lord Aberdeen, Lindsay, Houghton and I know not who else. On Tuesday evening there was a *Conversazione* in the Town Hall and Alec lectured there and exhibited his instruments. It was a magnificent hall, holding about two thousand people and it was filled full of ladies and gentlemen in evening dress, making such a pretty bright spectacle. The *conversazione* opened at about eight with singing by some young ladies of Aberdeen and at nine Alec came on the platform. I thought he looked and spoke very well, afterwards some gentlemen told use they could hear Alec well all over the hall. A result Alec confided to me due to his not having eaten anything since lunch time. He had some musicians and an organist stationed in another room and they played into the telephone so that everyone all over the large hall could hear. After the lecture came supper and an exhibition of microscopes. Lord Lindsay in one room, much too small to hold the crowd of people eager to see and hear him, displayed some of his electrical and 3 optical instruments, while the band played on the platform Alec arranged two forms in front of it and placed

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six small telephones in a row on anew— His idea was to have six people at a time sit down on one of the forms and listen for a minute in the instruments and then give place to six more people and so on, people collected around the forms wondering what Alec was about and some pushed and struggled into the forms, some with such an awfully cross and determined expression on their faces I got quite frightened and wondered how Alec could ever make them move and come in order, but he did and very easily and pleasantly. He stationed young men at either end of the forms to keep out the people and then the first six came in, listened and moved on. The plan worked fairly well so long as Alec was by to keep the people back but when he had to go the crowd pushed and squeezed and nearly knocked down the unhappy young man at the entrance to the forms. They all tried to get in at once pushed and struggled and finally broke all the telegraph wires and put an end to the whole thing. After this experience Alec will not try to let the whole audience listen to the instrument again. During the evening I saw Lord Lindsay, he was dressed in full Highland costume and with his tall big figure and bushy red hair and beard looked a veritable Highlander, an effect somewhat spoiled however by a pair of spectacles. Alec says he always wears that costume. Next day we were invited with some of the other sppers of the congress to visit the Earl of Aberdeen at Hald House, but Alec was in such a hurry to leave by one o'clock that he would not go, but instead sent to the Deaf and Dumb Institution and to the Telegraphic Office. He was just in time to catch the nine P. M. train for Keith. We stayed over night there and then started again for Elgin, where Alec was in the seventh heaven, he saw some of his old friends among them Mr. Frank Kennedy, who was thought to be dying of consumption when Alec last saw him, but who looks quite strong and robust now. The provost, some of the baillies and great people of Elgin hearing of Alec's arrival called to try and persuade him to lecture, two gentlemen came no less than three times one morning but Alec was not well, and I made him promise not to consent to lecture. Next day we went down to Covesea a little village of half a dozen thatched cottages, all in a row, perched on the top of some cliffs by the sea. In one of these little cottages we engaged a room for a week. Such a queer little room, low roofed the walls ornamented (?) with a horrible green wash that rubbed off whenever one brushed

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against it.it.Over the fire place hung a big Illustrated London News Picture of Queen Victoria, and all around were grouped more newspaper pictures, or bright tinted story book illustrations. Two small diamond windows with bits of lace before them gave light to the room. We had brought with us some cans of American preserved meat, one loaf of bread, a pound of butter which Alec insisted would last a week. I was quite glad when he had to send for some more before the week was over. Alec told the cottage woman that all we should need was a fire and some hot water! But he was the first to propose Mrs. Cameron taking the cooking off our hands — no not quite he would trust no one but himself and his wife, under his superintendence, with the preparation of his beloved red herrings! Mrs. Cameron was very nice and taught me how to make real Scotch oatmeal porridge and oatcakes for I mean to try and have some really Scotch dishes when I get into my own house. We spent the long mild days on the sands or on the cliffs where Alec was quite in his element scrambling up and down as of old, and pondering over the formation of the cliffs and caves tides and ruins dreaming beautiful dreams of flying through the air like the sea-gulls in books which gather in countless numbers along the shore. Alec tried to shoot them but he had only a pistol which he bought in Montreal during the Railroad riots and that was quite harmless. There were rabbits and hares, but they too eluded Alec. We were quite sorry to leave the pretty ooey place, but Alec found the bed rather too short for him. We stayed another day in Elgin and visited Pluscarden Abbey and saw Dr. Whyte who Alec says is not a bit changed. Then we journeyed on to Inverness and then slowly steamed down the beautiful canals and lakes to Glasgow. There we found a note from Mr. George Coats who has been anxious we should visit him at Paisley. We could however only pay an evening call. Alec found Mr. George Coats about the same, a little stouter and more red faced perhaps. He was full of reminiscences of his stay in Canada and anxious to know all about you all. He said he had been very anxious to see Alec to find out if he had grown his beard again, as he remembered shaving it off once. They have such a large pleasant English house and the family all seemed very pleasant. George Coats and one of his sisters were very much excited over a fancy ball they were going to, the one as a Sheperdess the other as a youngster of the last Century all in blue

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red and gold. Alec has accepted arrangements to lecture in Glasgow on the 8th., and in Greenock on the 9th., of November. They will not pay him for the first lecture but for the second he receives £15 & 15/- In Newcastle on Tyne he made fifteen pounds and ten shillings, in Aberdeen Twenty Five Pounds. I believe he is lectures in Bradford in a few days. Then the Society of Telegraph Engineers of London want him to deliver a lecture there some time this month. Mr. Reynolds from London writes that everything is going on very well indeed that he is receiving applications for Telephones and Telephonic Agencies on all hands. He has made a temporary arrangement with Mr. Le Neve Fonder for the manufacture of instruments. Several people are making Telephones on their own account but Mr. Reynolds has put them down. Now that Alec is getting so much better his mind in "chokeful" of ideas. As I have been writing he has been marching up and down the room coat and waistcoat off, his hands thrust into his pockets his mind busy working out new and ever simpler methods of Telephonic arrangements or apparatus. Just now he is perfecting a system of annunciators for telephones in Hotels, on the plan of Central district offices. Every now and then he stops before me and says, "This is a grand invention — theres a great deal of money in it", or "Its a wonder no one ever thought of it before." Now he thinks of using two magnets more and though I can scarcely understand the why and wherefore, it is all perfectly clear to him.

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But now this long letter must be tiring you all out. I wonder if you will have patience to read it through, never mind if you cannot, I cannot.

I hope you are all quite well, that Mr. Bell is satisfied with his arrangements. Alec has another idea for a call bell which he thinks simpler and better, he has sent drawings to papa to be manufactured.

With much love from both Alec and myself to you and Mr. Bell, to Mary Louise and Lizzie.

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Affectionately, Mabel.